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Chair: Mr. Saikal ..... (Afghanistan)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 29: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/73/38, A/73/263, A/73/266, A/73/285, A/73/294 and A/73/301)

1. **Ms. Scott** (Namibia), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that women constituted the majority of poor people in Southern Africa. SADC was committed to eliminating all aspects of gender inequality, including economic disparities and violence against women. Its founding treaty recognized the vital importance of women in development, as did various regional legal and programmatic instruments observed by most of its members. It was committed to achieving the gender-related goals of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. To date, legal progress had been encouraging. Constitutions had been amended and legislative provisions adopted to ensure equal rights for women, including access to justice, representation in political and decision-making processes and access to education, health and employment. However, the region continued to face challenges with regard to early marriage, family laws, gender-based violence, trafficking in persons, communicable and non-communicable diseases and the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. SADC viewed partnerships as an essential complement to the efforts of its members, who remained committed to ensuring the full social and economic participation of women and girls.

3. **Mr. Prongthura** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that gender equality had been a priority of ASEAN since the adoption of the Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region in 1988. Its strategies were guided by regional instruments, including the ASEAN Committee on Women Work Plan (2016–2020) and the ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals. In June 2018, it had held the Senior Officials Conference on Gender Mainstreaming in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Sectoral Bodies.

4. As a result of its efforts, gender mainstreaming was more advanced, and the general public was more aware of the importance of gender equality. Furthermore, women's labour force participation had gradually risen to an average of between 60 and 70 per cent. Nevertheless, recognizing the potential of a more gender-inclusive workforce, ASEAN had adopted the Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment in ASEAN.

5. ASEAN was working closely with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on the implementation of its regional and international commitments. UN-Women had contributed to the launch of the regional HeForShe campaign and to the conclusion of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Following the adoption of the Joint Statement on Promoting women, Peace and Security in ASEAN in 2017, the first ASEAN-Australia Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security had been held in April 2018.

6. **Mr. Escalante Hasbún** (El Salvador), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that the CELAC countries were firmly committed to gender equality and the empowerment of women. They undertook to eradicate all forms of violence and discrimination against women and to promote women's political and economic empowerment by eliminating social barriers and adopting and strengthening laws and policies on gender equality, access to education and justice, economic and financial independence and political participation. They acknowledged their international and regional commitments to strengthen their legal and political frameworks and to improve support for national mechanisms for the advancement of women.

7. The CELAC countries remained deeply concerned about the feminization of poverty and stressed the need to support national efforts to eradicate poverty in all its forms. They attached great importance to women's participation in politics and decision-making, as well as to the protection of migrant women and girls.

8. All States should have national policies and legal frameworks that promoted and protected the human rights of women and girls and ensured an effective response to violations of those rights, including all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination. They should promote the role of men and boys as agents of change for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

9. The CELAC countries would work to overcome the patriarchal cultural stereotypes that perpetuated the unequal distribution of labour, and they were committed to implementing policies and programmes to promote access to decent employment for all women, including those who faced multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. They recognized the contributions of older women, especially those who assumed responsibility for childcare, housework and farming in

the absence of other adults. They reaffirmed their commitment to enable women affected by natural disasters to be involved in the response as leaders and decision-makers on equal terms with men.

10. They recognized the important contribution of feminist organizations, women's movements and civil society to the inclusion of women's interests, needs and views in the international agenda. They also recognized the critical importance of rural women in sustainable rural development, as well as in in the prevention and resolution of armed conflict and peacebuilding. In February 2018, a regional consultation on the empowerment of rural women and girls, organized with the participation of UN-Women, had led to the Santiago Declaration, which would contribute to national efforts to ensure the economic empowerment of all women.

11. CELAC reiterated its firm support for UN-Women and welcomed the strengthening of its capacity. However, achieving gender equality and women's empowerment would require coordinated, coherent efforts throughout the United Nations development system, as well as greater international dialogue and consensus and increased international cooperation.

12. **Mr. Jürgenson** (Estonia), speaking on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries, said that every State had a responsibility to hold perpetrators of violence against woman or girls accountable. Given the range of problems that disproportionately affected women and girls, they urged improved gender mainstreaming in addition to targeted gender equality actions.

13. Access to affordable child care and parental insurance, including a more equal division of parental leave, were critical to closing the labour force participation gap and ensuring women's economic rights. Women and girls must be allowed to decide freely on all matters related to their sexual and reproductive health. In that connection, comprehensive sexuality education was key for improving public health and empowering women and girls. Moreover, integrating gender equality into the implementation of all sustainable development goals, with special attention to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, was a crucial component for progress.

14. With respect to empowering women in the digital age, it was necessary to develop information and communications technologies programmes that targeted women and girls. In addition, steps must be taken to address cyberbullying and online harassment.

15. The Nordic and Baltic countries stressed the importance of advancing the women, peace and security agenda and the need to end conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence immediately. They welcomed the growing emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment in the work of the United Nations and appreciated the Secretary-General's initiatives to combat sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse within the Organization.

16. **Ms. Wacker** (Observer for the European Union), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States; the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the European Union would continue to work towards gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and their full enjoyment of all human rights. It remained the world's largest investor in gender equality through actions such as the multi-stakeholder Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies and the European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women. The Spotlight Initiative recently launched the Latin America Regional Programme, which would combat femicide through a combination of well-funded in-country interventions and regional activities.

17. The European Union had signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), and it was currently updating its policy framework with a view to full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. It valued the work of civil society organizations and their partners and recognized the key role of the United Nations in mainstreaming the equality and empowerment of women and girls and combating violence against them.

18. The European Union observer delegation was working with its partners to draft strong women-related resolutions during the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. It remained committed to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. In that connection, it reaffirmed its commitment to promote and protect the right of every individual to decide freely on matters related to his or her sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, and stressed the need for universal access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, sexuality education and quality, affordable health care. It remained fully committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including Sustainable

Development Goal 5, and would continue to work closely with its partners to ensure that all rights were fully and equally enjoyed by all.

19. **Mr. Tanner** (Finland) said that women were at disproportionately high risk of violation of their right to life. More than [illegible] of female homicide victims were killed by family members or intimate partners, compared to just over 5 per cent for men. Homicide rates were particularly high for indigenous and disabled women and girls. Most of those deaths were preventable. To provide a better understanding of the magnitude of the problem, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions had called for States to cooperate on the collection of data on femicide.

20. Hate speech had increased in scale and intensity as a result of rapid global digitalization. It fed intimate partner violence and targeted feminist activists and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) women. Online hate speech should be curbed through more effective prevention, law enforcement and legislation. The tools for combating it could be found in existing international conventions.

21. In 2017, Finland had developed an action plan on violence against women through a participative process bringing together several ministries and civil society. The plan included investment in services for victims of violence and steps to improve data collection on femicide.

22. The international human rights conventions were the cornerstones of Finnish negotiations on sexual and reproductive health rights. Negotiators had lost touch with the realities of women and girls, and the hard compromises reached in Beijing and Cairo were being challenged and undermined. Finland was committed to the full realization of sexual and reproductive rights for women and girls around the world, and it was working to build alliances across regional divides for that purpose.

23. **Ms. Wagner** (Switzerland) said that, in Switzerland as elsewhere, the movements against sexual harassment and assault had reopened public debate on women's rights and social norms. Some cities, such as Lausanne, had already adopted measures to prevent and raise awareness about street harassment. Under a Swiss federal law, sexual harassment in the workplace was prohibited as a form of discrimination. However, a recent study of the law's effectiveness had found that around 80 per cent of cases were not decided in favour of the complainant. Noting that women were disproportionately targeted by online violence, she said that cyberbullying was a complex challenge that involved both cybercrime and the protection of the person and personal data. Switzerland would support the International Labour Organization in drafting a new international treaty to protect workers from harassment and violence and would implement the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, which had entered into force in April 2018.

24. **Ms. Oehri** (Liechtenstein) said that, in early 2018, her Government had adopted a national implementation strategy for the 2030 Agenda. On the basis of a gap analysis, it had decided to prioritize eight Goals, including Goal 5 on gender equality.

25. Although women and girls were disproportionately affected by sexual and gender-based violence, men and boys made up the majority of victims in certain contexts. Sexual violence against men continued to be underreported owing to cultural taboos. It was important to pinpoint the factors underlying sexual and gender-based violence in order to develop effective, sustainable solutions for all.

26. Noting that women were particularly vulnerable to modern slavery and human trafficking, she said that Liechtenstein had increased its penalties for human trafficking. Internationally, it had spearheaded the Liechtenstein Initiative for a Financial Sector Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

27. **Ms. Grignon** (Kenya) said that the 2010 Kenyan Constitution specifically guaranteed gender equality and women's empowerment and required the adoption of gender parity legislation. The President's new Big Four agenda focused on investing in food security, manufacturing, affordable health care and affordable housing, all key socioeconomic drivers for improving the lives of women, youth and children. In addition, Kenya had increased allocations to affirmative action funds targeting those groups. Thanks to free education and to specific programmes for vulnerable girls, school retention rates for girls had risen substantially. With the ultimate goal of universal health coverage, Kenya had boosted funding for free maternal and post-delivery health services and had built strategic partnerships with the private sector in order to improve quality and accessibility. It addressed gender-based violence through initiatives in five priority areas: prevention, protection, prosecution, programming and partnerships. In addition, it was conducting nationwide campaigns to change attitudes about such violence.

28. **Mr. Gonzalez** (Colombia) said that women were at risk of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, leading to their marginalization, poverty

and vulnerability. Women were key agents of the local and national economy, and their role in food security, the family, social cohesion and the transmission and preservation of the culture and protection of the environment must be recognized. Their full and effective participation was necessary to the realization of human rights.

29. His Government was working with national and regional authorities to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It had received invaluable assistance from UN-Women and gender expert Line Bareiro, as well as women's organizations. In its ongoing legal and institutional reforms, it was taking due account of the indispensable role of women in development and the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

30. **Ms. Koning-Hoeve** (Netherlands) said that, as the UN-Women representative for the Netherlands and a farmer herself, she knew many successful women in farming, but she had also met many other women farmers who faced inequality and poverty. She urged Member States to follow up on General Assembly resolution 72/148 on improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas and recommended focusing on five areas: enhancing the political and socioeconomic empowerment of rural women and supporting their full and equal participation in decision-making at all levels; providing support for women's and farmer's organizations and cooperatives; designing, revising and implementing laws to ensure that rural women were accorded full and equal rights to own land and other property; ensuring that all farmers could get a fair price for their products, and raising rural living conditions to urban standards.

31. **Ms. Rodríguez Camejo** (Cuba) said that the progress made since the Fourth World Conference on Women showed that gender inequalities could be reduced through political action. However, full equality and empowerment for women would be impossible in the absence of a just and equitable international order.

32. Cuba was proud of the progress it had made in the advancement of women. It had been the first country to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Women were paid the same wages as men for equal work; they received paid maternity leave and disability and widows' pensions, and they could own land and take out loans. Over half of the members of the National Assembly were women. Women and girls had access to free education, which was vital for their empowerment and the eradication of prejudices, discrimination and violence. Sexual and reproductive rights, including the right to abortion and birth control, were guaranteed.

33. With regard to violence against women, the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States perpetrated economic violence against Cuban women. Cuba continued to call for the elimination of all unilateral coercive measures and would continue to develop its social model, based on justice, equality and solidarity, in strict compliance with the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

34. **Ms. Miyazaki** (Japan) said that, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, immediate collective action was needed to ensure gender equality and empower women. In 2018, Japan had continued to do its part through increased international cooperation and development assistance, such as its $50 million contribution to the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi). At the domestic level, it had enacted a law on promotion of gender equality in the political field and another aimed at reducing excessive working hours and ensuring fair working conditions.

35. Japan would spare no effort to support the work the newly elected Japanese member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It continued to promote the women, peace and security agenda through support for the empowerment of conflict-affected women and girls and for the improvement of judicial systems for preventing sexual violence in conflict. In March 2019, it would hold the fifth World Assembly for Women in Tokyo alongside the Women 20 summit.

36. **Mr. Habich** (Peru) said that the Peruvian Government was actively working to include a gender focus in all public policies and would adopt a national gender equality policy by year-end. Peru's national policy on gender-based violence for 2016–2021 reflected the need to change sociocultural patterns. Peru had a policy of equal pay for equal work, and it was promoting women's active participation in the economy. Almost all public institutions guaranteed parental leave and benefits, while slightly more than half prohibited sexual harassment and provided for at least one intervention to address gender gaps. With respect to political representation, the Government had committed to the implementation of mechanisms to ensure the election of women to public office. It had been decided that the national and regional Governments should establish gender equality mechanisms to improve the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national gender equality policies.

37. **Mr. Bin Momen** (Bangladesh) said that the advancement of women was of great importance to its woman Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, who had received the Global Women's Leadership Award in 2018. Bangladesh had 72 women parliamentarians, and the Speaker of the House, the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition were also women. Girls significantly outnumbered boys in secondary school, and there were 20 million women in the workforce. Women had easy access to microsaving schemes, and women entrepreneurs were offered collateral-free bank loans, start-up funds and industrial plots.

38. While all of its national plans and policies were gender-responsive, Bangladesh was also implementing a national women's development policy as well as action plans for preventing violence against women and children, ending child marriage, combating human trafficking and ensuring gender equity. In addition, it operated safety net programmes for marginalized and vulnerable women. As an extremely climate-vulnerable country, it had launched various disaster risk reduction initiatives that had significantly enhanced the resilience of women and girls in natural disasters. It was therefore not surprising that, for the third consecutive year, Bangladesh had ranked first in gender equality in Southeast Asia in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index 2017.

39. Bangladesh was one of the world's largest exporters of workers, including many unskilled and semi-skilled female domestic servants who were often victims of sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation. His Government had hoped that the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration would address the issue in more concrete terms. Although it had taken steps to protect their rights, global efforts were needed to ensure adequate safeguards under existing international laws and treaties.

40. Having spearheaded the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, Bangladesh continued to work closely with the international community to further the role of women over the entire continuum of conflict. It had been the first to deploy female helicopter pilots in a peacekeeping mission, and it was increasing the number of Bangladeshi women peacekeepers.

41. **Mr. Chernenko** (Russian Federation) said that gender equality continued to be a relevant goal and required the active cooperation of all stakeholders. United Nations system bodies should take a balanced approach to gender issues, incorporating them into their work only where appropriate and relevant. His delegation reaffirmed its support for the Commission on the Status of Women as the primary intergovernmental forum for gender equality and the advancement of women. While it was generally pleased with the work of UN-Women, successful execution of its mandate hinged on close cooperation with the relevant United Nations entities and careful alignment of its operational activities with the overall political priorities of the Commission. It should provide assistance on the ground only at the request and with the permission of the State concerned.

42. While gender equality in the United Nations system was a desirable goal, candidate selection should not be based solely on gender but also on efficiency, competence, integrity and equitable geographical representation. In addition, steps should be taken to correct the gender imbalance in UN-Women, in keeping with the principle of involving more men in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality.

43. Under the plan of action to implement the first stage of its National Strategy for Women 2017–2022, the Russian Federation was implementing measures to protect women's health, improve their economic status, prevent and respond to violence against women and expand women's participation in political and public life. At the second Eurasian Women's Forum, held in Saint Petersburg in September 2018, the participants had decided that the next gathering would take place in 2021 and would be called the Global Women's Forum.

44. He encouraged all stakeholders to engage in a constructive and respectful exchange of views and positive experiences in the area of gender equality, with due consideration for the unique characteristics and traditions of the different Member States.

45. **Mr. Aziz** (Iraq) said that Iraq had had a personal status law since 1959, and its new citizenship law gave women the same rights as men. The electoral law had been amended to grant women the right to vote in parliamentary and local elections, while another law set a quota for women's participation in parliament. Iraq provided social protection for divorced, widowed and unmarried women and special protection and privileges for working women. It was preparing to adopt a law on domestic violence and was implementing strategies to combat violence against women and to promote their advancement. It had established a women's empowerment directorate and had launched microlending projects to empower rural women.

46. Following the defeat of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Iraq had extended aid to women survivors of horrendous human rights violations. Pursuant to the Joint Communiqué between the United

Nations and the Government of Iraq on Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, it was working on an implementation plan with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. It particularly welcomed the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Iraqi activist Nadia Murad for her work to fight sexual violence as a weapon of war.

47. **Mr. Sisouk** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that, under the Lao Constitution and other laws, the State had a responsibility to ensure that women enjoyed the same legal rights and economic and social opportunities as men. In fulfilment of that responsibility, as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda, the Government had once again mainstreamed the empowerment and advancement of women into its five-year socioeconomic development plan, which it was implementing alongside the Vision for Development of Lao Women 2030, the Strategic Development Plan for Lao Women 2025 and the Lao Women's Development Plan (2020–2025). His country had laws on the development and protection of women; preventing and combating violence against women and children; combating trafficking in persons, and the family. One sign of progress was the increased presence of women in positions of responsibility. His country would be presenting its combined eighth and ninth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was an active participant in the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

48. **Mr. Giorgio** (Eritrea) said that his Government was working to mainstream gender equality across all sectors, in close collaboration with national civil society organizations such as the National Union of Eritrean Women. In 2019, Eritrea would present its voluntary national review during the high-level political forum on sustainable development and would also present a periodic report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

49. Eritrea had achieved gender parity in primary and middle school, but further effort was needed at the tertiary level. Women had equal land ownership rights under the law, and steps had been taken to ensure that they acquired land. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the new agreed conclusion of the Commission on the Status of Women on challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

50. **Mr. Nurudeen** (Nigeria) said that the Nigerian Government was unequivocally committed to the advancement of women's rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and was implementing programmes to ensure women-inclusive socioeconomic development. In keeping with its National Gender Policy, it had launched a variety of initiatives, including the Stop Violence Against Women in Election project, the Girls' Education Project and national awareness campaigns on violence against women and girls, female genital mutilation and child marriage. The Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme provided no-collateral, interest-free microloans to small entrepreneurs such as women's cooperatives and market women.

51. Nigeria had launched its second national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in May 2017. In July 2018, it had unveiled the Northeast Nigeria Road Map for the multi-stakeholder Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies.

52. **Ms. Mecea** (Romania) said that individual women were often pivotal in successful efforts to advance the status of women. Thus, empowering young women and girls was essential. Romania was raising awareness among adolescent boys and girls about gender equality and non-discrimination through games and sport, as well as through essay competitions and debates that encouraged both reflection and activism. Successful women had shared their experiences with school audiences, and school curriculums had been revised to include a gender perspective. Gender equality was central to the commitments made by the President of Romania, one of the first HeForShe IMPACT Champions, and it was reflected in the composition of the Romanian youth delegation.

53. **Ms. Mbana Makina** (Equatorial Guinea) said that the President of her country considered women to be agents of socioeconomic development, and the First Lady undertook personal initiatives to promote their economic, social and cultural development. The national development strategy included women's empowerment, and it was working to eliminate disparities in access to education and training as well as school retention rates. While women's labour force participation had risen, it was still low, and family policies would be developed to boost it. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Gender Equality provided training and technical support in business organization and management for women entrepreneurs and women's cooperatives; coordinated the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equity nationwide and oversaw the construction and repair of social protection centres. It had also prepared a practical guide on the creation, organization and management of women's groups and associations. In the

November 2017 elections, women had obtained 20 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 11 seats in the Senate.

54. **Mr. Tōnē** (Tonga) said that Tonga valued women's contribution to sustainable development and continued to pursue gender parity in leadership and decision-making positions. In the most recent general elections, two women had been elected to Parliament, and in 2018 the first woman had been appointed to the judiciary. Its gender policy aimed to give women equitable access to economic and employment opportunities.

55. Tonga appreciated the support received through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative, which had strengthened its efforts to promote the participation of women in political processes. It also appreciated the assistance provided by Australia and Sweden through the Pacific Community for the establishment of a legal aid centre which provided free legal assistance to survivors of domestic violence. He thanked the Governments of Australia, New Zealand and Sweden as well as UN-Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for their continuing financial support for gender equality and the advancement of women in Tonga.

56. **Mr. Nugroho** (Indonesia) said that the President of Indonesia had committed to ending violence against women and girls as a HeForShe Champion. Indonesia's approach was comprehensive and holistic. In keeping with its national development plan, it was pursuing a strategy focused on raising awareness of the rights of women, capacity-building for the relevant institutions and multi-stakeholder cooperation. In the context of fostering a safe and secure environment for women, the Government was working with national universities to promote the Campus without Violence project, which had already reached more than 1,500 male high school and university students. To ensure access to justice for women victims of violence, Indonesia had established a system of integrated service centres, safe houses and specialized units in police stations and hospitals where women could report incidents safely and confidentially. Women victims were guaranteed due process of law and were treated in a gender-responsive manner. With respect to political participation, the percentage of women candidates in local elections had increased, and in 2018, 18 out of 101 women candidates for local office had been elected. Moreover, there were eight women ministers in the current Cabinet. Regarding harmful practices, Indonesia had banned female genital mutilation. The Government was working with women's and religious groups to raise awareness of its dangers and had developed advocacy tools, strategies and programmes.

57. **Ms. Abdelkawy** (Egypt) said that, in recent years, Egypt had worked hard to consolidate its legal framework on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Penal Code had been amended to criminalize sexual harassment and make female genital mutilation a felony, with increased penalties. The civil service law now gave working mothers four months' maternity leave instead of three; a new investment law treated men and women equally; and the inheritance law had been amended to impose stricter penalties for denying a woman's inheritance rights.

58. Regarding female genital mutilation, the Egyptian delegation contested some of the data in the report of the Secretary-General on intensifying global efforts for its elimination (A/73/266). Conclusions built on outdated, unverified data undermined the efforts of Member States and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and should be avoided in future reports.

59. Egyptian women now made up 15 per cent of parliament, 25 per cent of the ministers in the major ministries, and 49 per cent of local Government councillors. To combat gender stereotypes, Egypt had launched two media campaigns: one to empower women and the other to raise men's and boys' awareness of their role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. In the context of eliminating violence against women, Al-Azhar University had published a manual on curbing violence against women from an Islamic perspective. In addition, eight shelters for women survivors of violence had been upgraded, and a hotline had been established for reporting incidents of violence against women.

60. Egypt supported the Secretary-General's strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system. It had been a member of the Circle of Leadership on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations operations since its inception, and it had recently signed the related voluntary compact with the Secretary-General.

61. **Ms. McDowell** (New Zealand) said that although New Zealand had been the first country to grant women the right to vote and had had three women prime ministers, it was still working to achieve full, substantive gender equality. The previous week, the Government had announced new legislation to make it easier for workers to make pay equity claims. Paid parental leave had been extended to 22 weeks in 2018 and would be extended to 26 weeks in 2020. The Government had also set up a programme to encourage women and girls to train and work in science, technology, engineering and math.

62. Her delegation shared the concerns expressed in the report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (A/HRC/38/46), which reasserted women's fundamental right to substantive equality and called for concerted efforts to counter rollbacks and the increasing attacks against the universality of women's human rights. Like the Working Group, it decried the false justifications often used to keep women from taking their rightful place in society and family as equals or from exercising full control over their bodies and personhood. It welcomed the Human Rights Council resolution on preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and human rights in humanitarian settings (A/HRC/RES/39/10), which stressed the need for accountability for the full range of violations of women's and girls' rights in such settings. The Council had sent a clear message that States must take responsibility for ensuring women's and girls' rights to effective remedy, including reparation, and for preventing the recurrence of such violations in humanitarian settings.

63. **Ms. Bhengu** (South Africa), recalling Nelson Mandela's dedication to the promotion of human rights, said that the centenary year of his birth was a fitting time to rededicate the United Nations to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities. Ending violence against women remained a top priority of the South African Government. It was currently reviewing the Programme of Action Addressing Violence Against Women and Children to ensure its efficacy. It was committed to fighting sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse and recognized the need to strengthen South African institutions and equip law officers through gender-based training, as well as for policies to prevent those forms of violence and the revictimization of the victims.

64. **Mr. de Souza Monteiro** (Brazil) said that the report of the intersessional expert meeting to consider gaps in, challenges to and best practices aimed at the full enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls and the systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (A/HRC/39/34) would inform the discussions of the 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development. Brazil was committed to eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence, domestic violence, trafficking in persons and femicide. It recognized the importance of engaging all stakeholders and the vital contribution of men and boys. More than 20 years after the Beijing Declaration, no country had achieved gender equality, and many were in danger of backsliding. He urged Member States to continue moving forward in the promotion and protection of the human rights of all women and girls.

65. **Ms. Almudayhim** (Saudi Arabia) said that her country's 2030 Vision recognized women as major drivers of growth and sought to remove all obstacles to their economic, political and social empowerment. Saudi Arabia was developing a national strategy on women with a view to launching integrated initiatives for their empowerment. Under Saudi laws, men and women working in the public sector were guaranteed equal pay for equal work and subject to the same regulations. The military and civil service retirement schemes did not discriminate against women.

66. Guided by Sharia law, Saudi Arabia had developed a multimillion-dollar plan to combat trafficking in women and girls, and the Permanent Committee on Combating Trafficking in Persons cooperated with government entities and civil society organizations to prosecute traffickers and provide shelter, psychological and legal services and training for the victims. Saudi law criminalized female genital mutilation and protected women from all forms of violence. Its justice mechanisms did not discriminate and offered women the support needed to ensure prosecution. In addition to establishing a system to combat harassment, Saudi Arabia had launched a project to provide support for battered women and had set up a committee to protect women in their homes. In that connection, the recently established Family Affairs Council encouraged strong families with strong religious values. Saudi Arabia was working not only to provide job opportunities for women but also to ensure that they held leadership positions. Women occupied top positions on the stock market and in chambers of commerce and served as members of parliament and diplomats.

67. **Mr. McElwain** (United States of America) said that the United States was a global leader in developing and implementing international programmes to combat trafficking in persons. Its annual Trafficking in Persons Report had prompted the adoption of legislation and national anti-trafficking action plans, programmes and policies around the world. Since 2001, the United States had funded more than 960 anti-trafficking projects totalling more than $300 billion in foreign assistance, including training for criminal justice practitioners in 20 countries. It had formed partnerships with almost 200 government and non-governmental organizations to strengthen relevant legal frameworks, enforcement actions, programmes and policies. It also worked with businesses, workers' organizations and trade associations to combat child labour and forced labour in

global supply chains. In October 2017, it had launched an inter-agency human trafficking project team that used innovative approaches, new technologies and dynamic partnerships to combat trafficking in persons.

68. **Ms. Pongor** (Hungary) said that domestic violence was a stand-alone offence in the new Hungarian Criminal Code. Victims and their children could seek refuge and services at Government-run crisis centres and halfway houses as well as non-governmental shelters. To combat the feminization of poverty, Hungary had established social protection policies and programmes, including postpartum support, three-year paid maternity leave, a generous family tax benefit, a family allowance for each child, housing subsidies and the forgiveness of student loans for women with two or more children. To encourage mothers to remain in or enter the work force, women could work part time until their child was three years old and remained eligible for home child care benefits even after going back to work, and companies received a contribution reduction for hiring women with young children. The Government had increased the number of nurseries and day-care facilities and offered entrepreneurial and skills training. To encourage women and girls to excel in science, research and innovation, the President had established a commission for women in research careers. In addition, the Association of Hungarian Women in Science was working to improve the situation of women researchers and shape public opinion.

69. **Mr. Mongelos Galeano** (Paraguay) said that, while the Paraguayan Constitution guaranteed equality between men and women, it had not been achieved in practice. The newly formed Government would take charge of implementing the national plan on equality of opportunities for women and men for 2018–2023, which aimed to promote equal opportunities for political and social participation, decent employment, education, comprehensive health care, a clean and healthy environment and freedom from violence. Paraguay had conditional cash transfer programmes for women heads of household. In addition, its Ciudad Mujer centres provided 80 interconnected and coordinated services exclusively for women and their children.

70. **Mr. García Moritán** (Argentina) said that gender equality was one of the focuses of his country's first ever national action plan on human rights. To assist its efforts, UN-Women had recently opened an office in Argentina and was implementing a country programme. As President of the Group of 20, it would promote the mainstreaming of a gender-perspective across the forum's agenda with the help of the Business Women Leaders Task Force.

71. **Ms. Kipiani** (Georgia) said that, in the past 10 years, Georgia had introduced a number of legislative changes designed to foster gender equality, combat violence against women and promote women's role in decision-making. For example, political parties received additional funding if their candidate lists had at least 30 per cent women in each group of 10 names. In 2017, a commission had been established to prepare, coordinate and monitor national action plans on gender equality and violence against women and to promote gender mainstreaming. The new Human Rights Department monitored administrative and legal proceedings involving domestic violence, violence against women, discrimination and hate crimes and human trafficking. Georgia had conducted a number of awareness-raising campaigns on gender equality, as well as trainings for police officers, justice-sector officials and other government employees. It had also adopted national action plans on domestic violence, gender equality and implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

72. **Mr. Sor** (Singapore), noting the election of a woman as President of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, said that Singapore's election of its first women President also marked a milestone. As a meritocracy, Singapore was committed to gender equality. Women in Singapore enjoyed strong legal protection under its Constitution, the Penal Code, the Women's Charter and other laws. Almost all resident women were literate, and in 2017 over half of university graduates had been women. Women's labour force participation rate was now 80 per cent, and women had also made inroads in previously male-dominated professions. The Government worked with employers and unions to promote fair, responsible and merit-based employment practices. In 2017, Singapore had ranked twelfth out of 160 countries in the Gender Inequality Index.

73. In response to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, the Government had appointed women to top civil service positions. It had also established the Diversity Action Committee, which had set a target of 30 per cent women on corporate boards by 2020. The recently adopted Retirement and Re-employment Act enabled and encouraged older people to work beyond the age of retirement and would help to boost the adequate preparation for retirement of women.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.